WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 OCT. – NOV. 1981

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

U-M CELEBRATES A CENTURY OF NAVAL ARCHITECTURE; WCHS HAS RARE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE NAVAL TANK

A rare opportunity to see the University of Michigan naval towing tank will be offered at the Washtenaw County Historical Society meeting at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, November 12.

The U-M College of Engineering this fall is celebrating a century of naval architecture. The first course was offered in 1881.

Those attending are asked to meet at the West Engineering Building arch at South and East University Avenues promptly at 6:30 p.m. Professors Richard Couch and Armin Troesch will meet the group in Room 113, then proceed to Room 229 for orientation with slides before visiting the tank on the first floor.

The U-M has one of few such tanks in the world. Most are owned by governments. Naval architects study the effect of wind and wave action on model ships in the tanks.

Vice-president Frances Couch who arranged the visit asks that readers note the special time and place and be on time. So, don't forget – 6:30 P.M. THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, at the ENGINEERING ARCH.

GREENHILLS HOUSE TOUR FEATURES SIX HOMES

Six east side Ann Arbor homes with a variety of architectural and decorating styles will be open for the third annual Greenhills School Homes Tour noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, October 18.

The homes are at 1503 Cambridge, 1111 and 1130 Fair Oaks, 2038 Norway, 1808 Hermitage and 2012 Washtenaw.

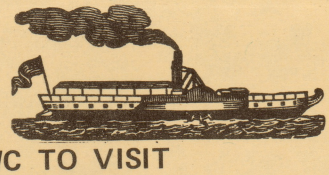
Proceeds will be used for scholarship aid to Greenhills School, a local independent school for grades 7--12, founded 11 years ago. It has 302 students now.

Tickets with printed tour guide at $5 will be available at any of the homes on tour day or in advance at several local shops and the school. For information call 769--4010.

HOWARD PARR RE-ELECTED BY MANCHESTER SOCIETY

Howard R. Parr was re-elected president of the Manchester Historical Society. Frances Nathan is first vice-president; Hazel Kappler, second vice-president; Caroline Sauter, secretary; and Hazel Walker, treasurer.

Tom Walton and Loring Ebersole are directors at large. Liz Grossman will serve on the board as immediate past president, a new board post this year.



GSWC TO VISIT DEXTER MUSEUM

The Genealogy Society of Washtenaw County will meet at 1 p.m. Sunday, October 25, at the Dexter Museum to browse through it and hear a talk about the museum plus a talk by Lydia Muncy on using museums in genealogy. No class that day.

The next meeting will be at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, December 6, at Washtenaw Community College, following a 1 p.m. class. Polly Bender will coordinate a program on area interest groups. Currently there are groups on German, New England--New York and Pennsylvania research, coordinated respectively by Louella Lutz, Nancy Krohn and Barbara Snow. Ohio and Washtenaw county groups may be formed.

HAGLERS TO TELL ABOUT RESTORING HOUSE THEY SAVED FROM DESTRUCTION

The story of a fine old Washtenaw County Greek Revival house nearly 150 years old and its recent restoration will be told at the next WCHS meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday, October 22, at the Salvation Army in Ann Arbor.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles V. Hagler who moved the house to Superior township to save it from destruction and now make it their home will present the program.

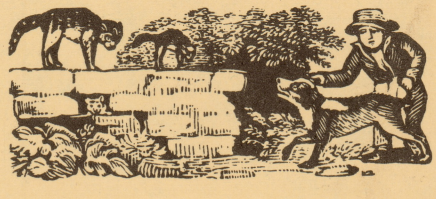
He is a public relations executive with General Motors and a member of the Michigan Historical Commission. She is curator of fine furniture at Greenfield Village. Mrs. Hagler, the former Katherine (Cotty) Bryant, is a niece of the late Henry and Clara Bryant Ford.

WCHS NETS $2,700 FROM JULY ART FAIR

WCHS netted about $2,700 from Art Fair activities made possible by Hazel Proctor and Great Lakes Federal Savings, Treasurer Bradley Taylor reports.

Great Lakes donated booth space to the Society as well as proceeds from rental of other spaces under its portico to artists. The Society rented out parking spaces in GLFS lots after hours and sold pop and Norman Rockwell prints.

Gross proceeds were $4,500 with $1,775 expenses, mainly for pictures and pop. Last year's net proceeds were $2,445. Rosalie Moore was general chairman. Her crew of volunteers were listed last month.



OLD MOVIE SHOW HAS IT ALL!

Newsreel, Singalong, Keystone Cops, Bathing Beauties

WCHS went to the movies — the silent movies — in September and came away laughing just as audiences did earlier in this century.

It was anything but a quiet evening as the audience reacted to the mad antics of Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin and the Keystone cops. There were even some Mack Sennet bathing beauties, daring in their time, more than fully clothed by today's standards.

Art Stephan, the man you may have seen playing the piano at Webers, showed a small sample of his collection of old movies, including early sound and color as well as silents.

The showbill included a composite Fox Movietone newsreel of some dramatic events of the 1930's, the latest fashions of 1928 in two-strip or two-color technicolor, a short about women with big hats in the theater and a documentary on Mack Sennet and the Keystone cops.

The second reel featured a singalong with bouncing ball, a Laurel and Hardy silent and the uncensored version of "The Dentist" with W.C. Fields.

Stephan started out with a joke about the man who took his dog to the movies. The man and the dog were sitting there watching the movie when the guy next to him couldn't stand it any longer and said, "Why did you bring your dog with you?"

The man with the dog looked at the second man and said, "He enjoyed the book so much I thought I'd take him to see the movie."

Stephan who has never had a television set started collecting old movies in 1971 when he answered an advertisement of Blackhawk Films in Davenport, Iowa, by sending $1.99 for a sample reel of film excerpts.

When he ordered another film, he got his $1.99 back but he was hooked. Collecting for him is "like an addiction."

"Theaters use 35 millimeter (mm) film. The real collector collects 16 mm and they turn up their nose at people like me who have a super 8 projector.

CLARA BOW
Star of 1920's

Courtesy of Art Stephan

"You can collect Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, "Our Gang", westerns, cartoons, musicals, newsreels, trains. My downfall is that I collect everything. I like longer silent feature films which are expensive. Today I ordered one with Pauline Moore and Gary Cooper called "Lilac Time."

He pointed out that "silent movies were never silent. They always had a piano or organ accompaniment and they didn't jump around. If you see one jumping around it means they are showing it at the wrong speed. Now most theaters don't have silent speed." Everything he showed except one short was at the right speed.

"Another thing — they weren't old and scratchy. What you usually see are copies from copies from copies. The originals were just beautiful.

"The other thing is they weren't black and white. They were tinted different colors — green in a forest, red in a fire. Sometimes you see a subtitle, "midnight" and it's broad daylight and you laugh. The original was tinted blue.

"Silents take a certain kind of watching — you have to keep your eye on the screen all the time." He wisecracked that "Silents (with subtitles) should be shown in the schools. The kids would learn how to read!"

He showed the newsreel because it had clips of the General Motors auto strike in Flint, the closest thing he could find in his collection to local history.

The first full-length three-color technicolor film was "Becky Sharp" in 1935 with Miriam Hopkins, he said. The two-color 1928 fashion show, seven years earlier, had no blue. A blue coat came out green.

The short about women in big hats blocking men's view of the stage was made by D. W. Griffith who made "Birth of a Nation" Mack Sennet in a checkered suit was seen in the short about hats.

The newsreel showed Ohio River valley floods, a Florida hurricane, the collapse of Honeymoon Bridge at Niagara Falls from ice buildup, riots in Paris, the GM auto strike at Flint (December 30,1936--February 11, 1937), and a textile strike in Rhode Island. In both cases tear gas was used.

King Alexander of Yugoslavia was shot and killed on camera while he was visiting in Marseilles, France (October 9, 1934). The newsreel cameramen were with Haile Selassie in Ethiopia as Italian war planes bombed his country and they filmed the Spanish civil war and war in China.

The newsreel composite concluded with the last voyage of the dirigible balloon "Hindenburg", showing it as it exploded into a raging inferno and collapsed at Lakehurst, New Jersey, (May 6, 1937), fatally burning 36 of 97 passengers.

The 1928 fashions featured head-hugging cloche hats, generally no-waistline dresses and furs. There were subtitles and accompanying up-to-date music dubbed in.

A narrated documentary about Mack Sennet explained that he started out as a boy soprano, tried burlesque for a while, then drifted

into the Biograph movie studio on 14th Street in New York City. There everyone did a little bit of everything. Sennet wrote, directed and filled in as an actor. He was shown playing in "The Butler" in 1909.

Shortly afterwards, Sennet started his own studio in California backed by two gamblers to whom he owed a hundred dollars. Fatty Arbuckle, Sennet himself and Mabel Norman were the studio's busiest stars.

The cornerstone of Sennet's Fun Factory was to be the Keystone cops. The idea began developing in Sennet's mind in 1913, first as a country constabulary whose antics were unmistakably those of the Keystone cops although they did not don city police uniforms until 1915.

In one Sennet film, a boy and a girl want to elope by boat, taking a justice of the peace with them. Her father wants to stop the ceremony and decides the only way to do it is to drain the lake.

Actually the Los Angeles park department had announced they were going to drain the lake. To Sennet this was an ingenious way of getting a spectacular effect at low cost so the film was made because of the planned draining.

In 1914 Sennet produced Hollywood's first full length comedy feature, "Tillie's Punctured Romance". The star, Marie Dressler, was at that time a bigger name than Charlie Chaplin, who played a supporting role along with Mabel Thomas.

Miss Dressler had gone west to act the part of the jilted heiress she had created so successfully on the stage. Mack Sennet, in awe of neither the star nor the original play, soon re-shaped "Tilly" into typical slapstick comedy with the Keystone cops.

She did not play again in films until 15 years later when she became one of the greats of talking pictures in "Tugboat Annie" and other films.

Chaplin's stature was growing rapidly. He began to have conflicting ideas on how to create comedy

Courtesy of Art Stephan

GLORIA SWANSON
Started film career in 1915. Shown here ca. 1940?

and soon started directing as well as starring in Sennet two-reelers. He later left the studio. Charlie's tramp costume was already established although his screen character was still forming. It mellowed from an aggressive, inconsiderate little man to the familiar lovable tramp.

Turning out two or three comedies a week took a lot of ingenuity on Sennet's part. To give the impression of wide open spaces for chase sequences, he devised a revolving cyclorama with a painted background which moved past the actors who were on a treadmill. The wind machine saw heavy service. Also Sennet comedies were rarely subtle and comics had to be acrobats.

Though not one of Sennet's bathing beauties, Gloria Swanson broke into films at age 16 and was soon Cecil B. DeMille's leading star. Carole Lombard also started with Sennet but his favorite was madcap Mabel Norman, the Lucille Ball of her day.

An hilarious sequence from "The Extra Girl" was shown in which Mabel is cast as a wardrobe helper assigned to transform Teddy, the studio dog into a lion because the real lion is too ferocious.

The crew takes her dog-lion off to the set and the lion trainer puts the real lion back in the cage. Mabel, unaware of the switch, has such trouble getting water to Teddy that she decides to take Teddy to the water. She actually takes the real lion, of course, and bedlam ensues.

Many of the great comedy stars — Chaplin, Langdon, Swanson, Arbuckle, Carole Lombard, Bing Crosby — started in Sennet's Fun Factory, but faithful cross-eyed Ben Turpin stayed with Sennet right through the twenties. In a sequence from "The Daredevil" in 1924 Ben transfixes the villain with his crossed eyes.

Turpin originally crossed his eyes "as a bit of business" but somehow they got crossed permanently and an insurance company wrote a million dollar policy against their uncrossing.

Silents used elaborate pantomime. The inevitable Sennet chase had such Fun Factory trademarks as cars speeded up by slowing down the cameras and trolleys backing up by reversing the camera.

Humor in slapstick comedy was built on outrage and sadism, but since it was divorced from reality and nobody ever got dirty, this never proved offensive. After sound, this brand of humor disappeared, only to be reincarnated more savage and ferocious than ever in cartoons.

When sound came in 1928, Sennet had no big names left and his format was soon rendered old-fashioned. The sight gag was almost dead. He had become a millionaire but lost his fortune in 1929.

A slow singalong version of "In the Good Old Summertime" opened the second reel, followed by Laurel and Hardy as musicians in an orchestra, and the 1932 sound film, "The Dentist", with W.C.Fields.

W. C. Fields is a dentist who seems more interested in golf and keeping his daughter from eloping with the ice man but gets in a few licks as a dentist with a wicked sounding drill. Patients writhe in highly audible pain, there are a few cuss words and there is a final suggestive tootpulling scene "that I don't know how they ever got away with," Stephan commented. Both dentists and moralists wanted to ban it.

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS: OF MICHIGANDERS IN GOLD RUSH, APPLE BOBBING, ETC.

Chelsea Historical Society — 7:30 p.m. second Monday at McKune Memorial Library, 221 S. Main Street.

Dexter Historical Society — Board and membership meetings alternate months, 8 p.m. first Thursday at museum, 3443 Inverness. Membership meeting in November.

Museum will be open 1--3 p.m. each Tuesday, second and fourth Saturdays through December 19 or by appointment by calling 426--2519. Christmas bazaar December 5.

Manchester Historical Society — 8 p.m. third Monday at Emanuel Church. Old-fashioned varieties of apples and their uses, such as bobbing for apples, will be Tom and Mary Walton's topic in November.

Milan Historical Society — 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday at Hack House, 775 County Street.

Northfield Historical Society — The sites committee has started inventorying features of historical interest in the township.

The meeting at 150 year old St. Patrick's Church was changed to Sunday, October 11, from September.

Salem Historical Society — No meeting in October. Normally meet 7 p.m. second Thursday at South Salem Stone School or elsewhere. For information call 437-9657.

Saline Historical Society — 2 p.m. third Sunday at Senior Citizens Room, Service Center on Maple Road, except October 11 house tour took place of October meeting.

Webster Historical Society — 7:45 p.m. first Monday at Webster Community Center, Webster Church and Farrell Roads. Picking out a preservation project and a nominating committee on November agenda.

Ypsilanti Historical Society — "Wolverines in Search of Eldorado" will be John Cumming's topic at the annual dinner meeting at 6 p.m. Sunday, October 25, at Masonic Temple, 76 North Huron Street.

Cumming, director of the Clarke Historical Library at Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, will talk about men from Michigan in the gold rush.

Tickets for the roast beef dinner are $5 for adults, $3 for children under 12. Reservations, due October 21, may be made at the museum, 482-4990.

William Smart's collection of antique clocks will be exhibited now through November at museum, 220 North Huron. Museum hours 2--4 p.m. Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

SILENT FILM SOCIETY MAY BE ORGANIZED

Inspired by the enthusiasm of his WCHS audience, Art Stephan is considering organizing a Silent Film Society if he finds enough interest.

Anyone interested in more information should send name and address to: Ann Arbor Silent Film Society, P.O. Box 2794, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

DR. BOUGHNER ELECTED

Dr. Wesley Boughner is now serving as president of the Northfield Township Historical Society, following resignation of Cecil Warner who will serve as vice-president. Eleanor Halterman is the new treasurer replacing Karl Ehnis who was not able to continue. The Society was organized last spring.

NEXT ISSUE IN DECEMBER

Please note that because of the early meeting next month (November 12 to visit the U-M naval tank) there will not be another issue of *The Impressions* until December.

Editor: Alice Ziegler, 663--8826
Keylining: Anna Thorsch
Mailing: Ethelyn Morton, 662–2634

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

8:00 p.m. THURSDAY OCTOBER 22, 1981

SALVATION ARMY

West Huron at Arbana Ann Arbor, Michigan

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 96
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Ypsilanti Historical Museum
220 W. Huron St.
Ypsilanti, Mich.
48197